

Kaatz Icehouse  
255 Whitney Avenue  
Trumbull  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-6

HAER  
CONN,  
1-TRUM,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

HAER  
CONN,  
1- TRUM,  
2-

Kaatz Icehouse  
CT-6

LOCATION: 255 Whitney Avenue  
Trumbull  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut

DATE OF ERECTION: 1908-1929

PRESENT OWNER: Town of Trumbull

PRESENT USE: Demolished, May 1978

SIGNIFICANCE: The Kaatz Icehouse was the last large commercial icehouse in Connecticut (possibly on the East Coast) before demolition in May of 1978.

Although constructed totally in the twentieth century (initial section in 1908), the Icehouse was one of the earliest industrial buildings in Trumbull, which remained basically a rural community until 1914.

The Kaatz Pond, site of the structure, had been previously used for ice production before acquisition in 1905 by Ernst Kaatz. The prior owner, Charles F. Palmer, had extensive ice cutting transactions along the Pequonnock waterway. Upon purchase of the pond, Kaatz joined immediately into partnership with Harry and Louis Josephson and John Robstock. The following year they incorporated as The People's Ice Company and operated for the next three years, cutting from the Kaatz Pond and the pond of John Radcliffe on the Pequonnock River. Their facilities consisted of three-sided wooden enclosures without roofs, at both ponds, used to store the ice before transfer by train to a warehouse in Bridgeport. In 1909 The People's Ice Co. went bankrupt, and the pond ownership reverted to Ernst Kaatz. The early storage shed had been enclosed a year earlier to form the northern section of the Kaatz Icehouse. As the ice cutting business expanded with the economy, the building accordingly expanded with additional storage space to the south. Additions were constructed in approximately 1915, 1920 and 1929.

The Icehouse building was externally braced, containing large, uninterrupted spaces. The walls were insulated by layers of diagonal boards and building paper. The elevator fed gravity runs that led to the farthest reaches of the building.

(continued)

The Kaatz Icehouse  
INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS  
HAER No. CT-6 (page 2)

The pond was dug by hand, 10 feet deep at the deepest point. The ice was cut at 10 & 1/2 inches. The pond was drained each summer and used for vegetable and flower cultivation. Some winters were not cold enough for ice cultivation, and ice then had to be purchased from further north and sold at a loss.

The three northern sections of the Icehouse were used for ice storage, while the southernmost section (the newest) was used for office and equipment storage. The two northernmost sections were gambrel roofed, the oldest being four stories and the second being three stories. The third section was two stories with a low gable roof topped by three low monitors. The one story south section had a gable roof. Foundations are stone and concrete. Walls are unpainted clapboard on the east elevation and are painted grey on the the west elevation. The walls of the south wing are painted white.

The narrow openings on the facades were used for loading and unloading the ice. The elevator operated through a series of short flights and runners. Originally this was horse driven, but it was electrified in the 1920's. The ice was cut in blocks approximately 10 to 12 inches square. It took about 10 days to completely cut the pond once. Three cuttings of the pond would completely fill the icehouse. Although natural ice continued to be preferred by many customers after World War II, the proliferation of mechanical refrigeration equipment and the accelerated pollution of the air and surroundings (causing dirty run-off into the pond which fouled the ice) resulted in the eventual closing of the icehouse in 1954. Impending construction of a highway by the State through the property resulted in the demolition of the Kaatz family home and sale of the property and Icehouse to the town of Trumbull. Although a serious attempt was made to create an adaptive use for the building, no viable alternative could be implemented, and the Kaatz Icehouse was demolished in May of 1978.

TRANSMITTED BY: Kevin Murphy, Historian HAER, May 1984.